

**JUNE 2021 | I S S U E 4**

# AEDE IMPACT

**News, Research, and Ways to Connect  
Message from Dr. Tim Haab**

Over the last decade, AEDE has evolved into a university, state, national, and international leader in the generation and dissemination of new and applied knowledge in agricultural, environmental, development, and regional economics.

While the pursuit of excellence is a worthy goal, I am particularly proud that our department has pursued our goal of being a world-leading department with an unerring commitment to our core values of ensuring a diverse, inclusive, and equitable working and learning environment for all faculty, staff, and students.

Recently, as part of an ongoing evaluation of our policies and procedures, AEDE faculty adopted new Core Value, Mission, and Vision statements. The Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics believes in:

- **Excellence:** an aspirational goal to be outstanding in research, teaching, outreach and extension, and leadership in service to the University, profession, and society.
- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion:** excellence can only be achieved if we value and support diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work.
- **Integrity, transparency, and trust:** constructive and respectful engagement, honoring differences, and actively supporting varied paths to achieving excellence for students, faculty, and staff.



**AEDE Mission:** Create meaningful impact through excellence in the generation and exchange of knowledge in agricultural, environmental, development, regional, and related fields in applied economics. This is achieved through innovative and creative research, inclusive classroom experiences, mutual respect for competing ideas, constructive engagement with diverse audiences and disciplines, and a continual commitment to valuing, encouraging, and rewarding diversity of thought, skills, activity, and outcomes.

**AEDE Vision:** To promote an inclusive, equitable, prosperous, and sustainable society through the generation, teaching, and application of knowledge in applied economics.

Of particular note in these statements is the recognition that excellence is not an endpoint. Excellence in the generation, teaching, and application of new

knowledge is an evolving aspiration that is inextricably linked to fairness, equity, and integrity in all that we do. I continue to be proud to work in a department that is willing to challenge itself to achieve such high aspirations, and I continue to be proud of our faculty, staff, and students for holding themselves to such high standards.

Dr. Tim Haab  
Professor, AEDE Chair, Dean's Chair, Leader of the CFAES Knowledge

## AEDE IN THE NEWS

- What's going on with lumber prices?, Brent Sohngen, May 20, 2021, Morning Ag Clips
- Planning on dining out in a Columbus restaurant? Expect to pay more, Zoë Plakias, May 13, 2021, The Columbus Dispatch

## LECTURER PROFILE: DATHIEL NIMMONS

Dathiel Nimmons has worked in food supply chain management her entire career, most recently as senior vice president at Bob Evans. She also owns and operates two farms. She knows agribusiness and says supply chain is what makes it tick.

## CONGRATULATIONS AEDE FACULTY

- Dr. Zoë Plakias and fellow researchers receive National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant to study the impact of farm to school legislation on farmers, supply chain business, rural communities, and economics.
- Dr. Sathya Gopalakrishnan is among 21 researchers who have been named to the first cohort for the CFAES Growing Research Opportunities (GRO) Academy.
- Dr. Ani Katchova has been promoted to professor.

Agribusiness Supply Chain



“The agribusiness supply chain includes equipment manufacturers, seed or fertilizer suppliers, growers, bankers, processors, truckers, and retailers,” says Nimmons. “It is a complex and interdependent system full of opportunities.”

As lecturer for AEDECON 3105, Principles of Agribusiness and Food Supply Chains, she brings together years of professional and personal experience to illuminate food’s journey from farm to fork and help students identify areas they might work in during internships or after graduation.

Through lectures and coursework, students learn of the actors, intrinsic issues, and support systems that are essential to make agribusiness, commodity, and food supply chains effective. They also get to develop a supply chain of their own.

Nimmons says that understanding up-lines and down-lines and not just one piece of the supply chain is imperative, especially for students who plan to return to family farms after college. She says students need to understand where their operation fits in with the entire chain.

She asserts that farmers and producers require more skills and tools to be successful than in the past so coursework also covers big data, analytics, finance, automation, and the use of drones and GPS satellites in precision farming.


“Technology in agribusiness is going to make a difference,” says Nimmons. “How we

leverage that technology as we do more with less will increase efficiencies.”

Students also benefit from Nimmons’ experience as a hiring manager. In class, they examine skills needed to be successful as they begin careers and how to stand out among peers. One assignment is for students to develop a 90-second elevator pitch to sell her on hiring them. They not only have to communicate their experience and unique skill sets but develop and use language to close the deal through following up with prospective employers.

“Students have to know who they are, their value, and be able to sell themselves to employers,” says Nimmons. “As they grow in their careers, they will need emotional intelligence and leadership skills to progress.”

Dr. Anna Parkman, AEDE Undergraduate Program Leader says students love Nimmons’ passion and the real-world knowledge they gain by taking the course.

“She is a force,” says Parkman. “She has jumped in with both feet and is engaged with the entire teaching process.” 

## STUDENT PROFILE: NICK MESSENGER

### Pandemic pushes graduate student back into student government service

Nick Messenger received his BS in economics from The Ohio State University in 2013. As an undergraduate, he took an active role in student government and served as president. After graduation, he taught in public education for a few years before deciding to return to Ohio State to pursue his PhD in regional and urban economics.

His plan was to put all his energy into educational policy research and into studying the intersection of education, economics, and geography.

Then the pandemic hit. Teaching and learning moved into the virtual space. Labs closed. Research was halted. Students entering graduate programs couldn't meet their advisors or their cohorts in person. They couldn't travel to conferences or enter the job market. A conversation with the then president of The Ohio State University's Council of Graduate Students (CGS) left him feeling validated and activated.

"They told me my experience working in student government would greatly benefit the council's work with university president Kristina Johnson and other leadership to work through pandemic-related issues unique to graduate students," said Messenger.

He agreed to serve on select committees



that met with leadership to proactively develop a plan to reactivate campus in a way that took into account graduate students' physical, emotional, and logistical needs. He wanted to continue to advocate for graduate students, so he decided in March of 2021 to run for president and was elected to lead CGS.

His first objective is to ensure that as graduate students come back to campus in the fall, there are resources and support around mental health. Messenger and his team are also working with university leadership to develop centralized, virtual orientation modules to go live in Carmen in August so staff, faculty, and students all have access to important information in order to navigate dining halls, mental health resources, student health care, and HR issues.

As president, Messenger is also




working with leadership to submit a new graduate enrollment plan that centers on diversity and improving equity in the graduate student experience.

“We want to increase our diversity across the student body by recruiting the best, brightest, and most diverse group,” said Messenger. “But also develop cultural competency so we create a culture on campus that supports that diversity.”

During monthly meetings with President Johnson, his team provides a pulse on what programs and supports are needed to ensure

During monthly meetings with President Johnson, his team provides a pulse on what programs and supports are needed to ensure graduate student success. He says Johnson is a big supporter of graduate students and change.

“She has her PhD and has been through the gauntlet of professional academia,” said Messenger. “I think we have an ally in this president who is supportive of these big changes.” 

## RESEARCH PROFILE: Survey says...better designed survey questions generate truer responses

Whether it is after a webinar or an organization soliciting information, we all fill out our fair share of surveys. According to Wuyang Hu, professor and AEDE Honors Coordinator, the responses recorded in a survey may not always reflect reality, particularly surveys asking folks “what do you plan to do” instead of “what have you done.”

Hu studies how to improve survey data quality and particularly, how to reduce the difference between information obtained from a survey and through reality. He applies these techniques to examine a variety of issues related to consumer food choices and agribusiness owner’s decision making. Hu says better designed questions yield more precise answers and that in order to reduce



bias, survey questions should make people think harder in order to provide deep answers.

One example from a survey Hu plans to send to Ohio producers, growers, and small agribusiness owners, asks “how much revenue have you lost during COVID from March 2020 to March 2021,” instead of “how much do you think COVID has impacted your business?”

Hu explains that the first question is better defined and can generate a

dollar figure that actually shows different levels of impact on businesses instead of a generic answer such as “a lot” that may be expected as a result of asking the second question. Hu says posing questions about a person’s actual willingness to pay also generates a truer response.

“Saying you support something is much different than agreeing to financially back that support,” says Hu. “And when you remind respondents that financial support of a cause would be in addition to existing financial investment, their tune changes.”


In 2018, Hu and a group of OSU students designed a study that asked students if they would be willing to support The Ohio State University becoming a certified Bee Campus. The survey detailed how the Xerces Society, a non-profit environmental organization made up of general civilians, offers a Bee Campus certification program that recognizes, supports, and encourages pollinator conservation on U.S. college and university campuses.

Who doesn’t want to help pollinators such as bees, especially on an agricultural campus? Turns out most students surveyed were in favor. But when money to fund the initiative came into the equation, students were less supportive.

Then when students were told that the cost to support the program would be an additional fee to their already-paid student fees, there was less support.

Hu and students plan to produce an additional version of the survey and ask students to give money up front to back the certification process.

“We anticipate that the percentage of students we actually collect money from will be less than the amount of money that was previously committed on paper,” says Hu.

This research shows that survey responses have consequences and that the more we think about reality and the reality of financial support, the less willing we are to green light projects, initiatives and causes. Performing cost-benefit analysis relies on precise and realistic estimates of the costs and benefits. Hu, a behavioral and experimental economist at heart believes the bottom line is this: money matters a lot. 

## ENGAGE WITH US

We’d love to hear from you about industry and personal updates, and answer your questions. Visit [go.osu.edu/engageaede](https://go.osu.edu/engageaede) to sign up for newsletters and event announcements and send us a personal message. Thank you!